

Girls on the Edge of the Reagan Era

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In 1980, the election year that led to the end of both the Carter presidency and the Iranian hostage crisis, three remarkable girl culture films appeared. *Foxes* (Adrian Lyne), a hip melodrama, portrays the lives of four sixteen-year-olds from dysfunctional Los Angeles families. *Little Darlings* (Roland F. Maxwell), ostensibly a summer-camp comedy, depicts a contest between a tough working-class girl and a privileged rich kid to lose their virginity. From intense rivalry, the pair move to bonding as best friends. *Times Square* (Allan Moyle) also joins a street-smart teen with a rich girl as they escape authority, live by their wits on the street, and produce a grassroots teen girl rebellion against an urban renewal real estate deal. Taken together, these films capture a social and historical moment, a liminal space for female teens poised between the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate period and the "Reagan renewal."

By viewing them as girl culture films, I mean to stress that while boys and men appear, the films are primarily about white young women bonding, expressing the situation of girls in a group or pair, and showing the world from their perspective. I want to validate these films by considering them: recalling *Foxes*, a film often remembered by women who saw it when it was first released but neglected today; remembering *Little Darlings*, often referred to as "Little Dykes" in the 1980s lesbian community; and rediscovering *Times Square*, which bombed in its own time but is amazingly prescient today with the Disneyfication of West 42nd Street in Manhattan. I also want to reflect on some questions of reading the way these films express the independence of young adolescent girls—or the lack of it—in relation to a past history and social moment as well as cinematic expression.

Context

Because they are examples of commercial entertainment cinema, these films must be placed in relation to their times and understood in the context of other girl/teen films. Such films narrate three general (if often overlapping) age phases of representation and story. First, we find films of female childhood played out by juvenile actors and bounded by a preadolescent time frame (for example, *The Little Princess* [1939]). Then there are films of early adolescence such as those discussed here. Third are dramas of the later teen years and early adulthood when girls become fully mature adults (for example, *Ruby in Paradise* [1993]). Within the Hollywood system, these age groupings fulfill two obvious functions. On the one hand, they signal narratives that tend to be keyed to specific audiences, in this case girls and young women. On the other hand, they provide appropriate narrative frames, since the teen years as a time of transition provide a bedrock for creating cinematically effective drama, conflict, and change. Further, given the Hollywood production system, we can recognize in U.S. cinema distinct patterns dictated by the evolving star system, ranging from the perennial girlhood of Mary Pickford to the (often delayed) cinematic development of female juveniles such as Shirley Temple and Judy Garland. And audiences have the experience of watching such girl stars as Elizabeth Taylor, Hayley Mills, Jodie Foster, Brooke Shields, and Drew Barrymore grow up.

The historical development of a distinct U.S. teen culture in the post-World War II era adds another dimension. In *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*, Jon Lewis surveys films of the 1970s and 1980s and finds that

teen films all seem to focus on a single social concern: the breakdown of traditional forms of authority: patriarchy; law and order; and institutions like the school, the church, and the family. . . . By and large, the teen film presides over the eventual discovery of viable and often traditional forms of authority . . . in effect, the restoration of the adult authority informed rather than radicalized by youth. (3)

Lewis concentrates on films that represent youth culture primarily through institutions that highlight teens. Most teen films show mixed-gender groups—such as *Grease* (1978), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), and *The Breakfast Club* (1985)—or concentrate on primarily male groups, such as *Porky's* (1981) and *Revenge of*

the Nerds (1984). Other writers have broadened the scope of teen films. For instance, William Paul's *Laughing Screaming* elaborates teen horror (for example, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series [1984–89]) and gross-out comedies (for example, *National Lampoon's Animal House* [1978]). We could expand the male teen category by adding military basic-training stories (*Platoon* [1986]; *Full Metal Jacket* [1987]) or reformatory movies (*Bad Boys* [1983]). Some films concentrate on female characters' point of view, such as the slasher horror genre (*Halloween* [1978]; *I Know What You Did Last Summer* [1997]) so well analyzed by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* for the figure of the "Final Girl" who defeats the killer.

Some gals' and guys' teen films show significant actions of female leads from their young women's point of view (the sexual initiation sequences in *Fast Times* or *Valley Girl* [1983], or the sympathetic female leads of *Sixteen Candles* [1984] or *Smooth Talk* [1985]). However, these films do not show girl culture or female bonding in groups or pairs in the same way as the three films I am concentrating on. It is not until the 1990s with films such as *Mi Vida Loca* (1994), *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), and *Girls Town* (1995), the spate of costume films such as *Little Women* (1994), and the various Jane Austen adaptations such as *Clueless* (1995) and *Emma* (1996) that we observe attention centered on young female culture.

More particular to the cinema, the appearance of the three films in the same year marks a pattern. Three suggests more than an accident. (The rule of thumb in Hollywood is that any significant action must be shown/spoken three times: once for clever viewers, twice to be clear to the majority, and a third time for the slow or distracted. Two could be coincidence; three is a pattern.) These films appeared on the cusp of the Reagan era, but movies are not politically clairvoyant. Given the time it takes to get scripts into production and exhibition, it would be foolish to read back directly from the fact of the conservative shift signaled by Reagan's election (in November 1980) to the precise production of meaning in these filmic narratives. However, the late 1970s was a time that embodied the contradictions of a specific historical moment, and in that way the films can be seen as exhibiting symptoms of deeper structures, some of which took on a different aspect with the shift in national executive governance. Therefore, considering the basic social fantasies embodied in these films helps us understand their uniqueness to their time, as well as that time, and also their ongoing appeal.

Fantasy

Psychoanalytically based criticism perceives fantasy as developing around deep unconscious patterns found in the mind and echoed in the text. But my interest here is in what I will call social fantasies: somewhat vague and general projections that satisfy persistent needs in specific social groups. For young people such fantasies found in creative cultural products facilitate a useful projection, a kind of modeling behavior, that is practical and needed in adjusting to life at moments when it seems difficult—and sometimes impossible—to keep physical, emotional, and intellectual levels all in sync. Jon Lewis plausibly argues that *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) is a foundational teen culture film, and that both in story and star image James Dean functioned for a generation as the archetypal “moody (male) teenager.” In our time, the remarkably successful television channel MTV has prominently maintained its teen audience base with the documentary shows “Real Life” and “Road Rules.” These series have a common denominator of offering glimpses, primarily to those not yet there, of what may soon be their experience: living away from home, being sexually active, and living with others you have to learn to get along with instead of family. For middle and high school students, these shows are model situations that allow them to project their own fears and anxieties, hopes and desires, onto other characters and safely observe actions and decisions that they may not be ready for in real life, but know that they probably will experience sooner or later. The same function is served by the MTV dramatic shows such as “My So-Called Life” and “Undressed.” The former (originally an ABC network drama in the 1994 season) deals with the interpersonal and emotional aspects of high school life, and the latter depicts the sexual experiences of teens. As has often been noted, other recent successful television shows have the same role and appeal: “Dawson’s Creek” (small-town teen life) and “Felicity” (off to college) in a melodramatically realistic vein, and “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Angel,” and “Roswell” in a more fantastic way. Even MTV cartoon comedy shows provide this kind of modeling: “Beavis and Butt-head” with the boredom and authoritarian atmosphere of school and fast-food workplaces, and “Daria” with the title brainy girl suffering the inanity of school sociality and her family. Of course this idea of projective fantasy does not exhaust the audience’s relation to these or other works, but it is most assuredly a key part of the media appeal. In this framework, the three girl culture films I am considering also contain social fantasies. I want to consider the

films in terms of the nature of those fantasies, both in their own historical moment and as they have continued to have relevance for contemporary viewers.

Foxes: Reconstituting the Family

By the time *Foxes* appeared, the notion of southern California teen culture as the cutting edge of U.S. culture as a whole was well established. In the 1950s, *Rebel Without a Cause* established the terrain in the popular cinematic imagination, and the beach party movies, such as *Beach Party* (1963) and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965), provided a carefree teen comedy framework while the Beach Boys and other surf-sound pop music groups created an aural background throughout the 1960s. The Berkeley student movement and flower children in northern California expanded media attention. By the end of that decade journalist Tom Wolfe was covering "a new way of life out there" for eastern seaboard readers in feature journalism on southern California, in particular in his essays, "The Pump House Gang" and "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." Trained in American studies at Yale, adopting a hip persona and a florid, highly subjective writing style, Wolfe moved against the grain of media concern with campus and antiwar protests and hippie culture, uncovering a fundamental vapidness, a youth culture not rebelling against authority but detached from absent parents.

A decade later, *Foxes* presents four young women looking for their own place in a southern California culture that, far from celebrating youthful freedom, entraps it. The girl group has a common goal to save Annie (Cherie Currie), who bounces from irresponsible drug use to physically abusive encounters with her father, a cop. Jeanie (Jodie Foster) acts as the mother to the group and to her own divorced mother (Sally Kellerman), who introduces her new boyfriend from bed when the teen is leaving for school. Madge (Marilyn Kagan) is sweet, warm, and naive, while Dee (Kandice Stroh) is conventionally attractive, manipulative, and cynical.

The girls move through a gauzy Los Angeles that complements the narrative search for their own space. Rather than the hard, open, bright midday light that dominates most film images of L. A., here exteriors are shot in the early morning and late afternoon or at dusk, with a diffused light. Interiors seem oppressively small and cramped with other people. With intense exterior light softly diffused into an extremely low-key environment, extensive use of long

lens close-ups increases the sense of spatial compression. The visual style matches a slow-moving narrative. Often the camera follows characters through the events, privileging visual narration as opposed to the conventional Hollywood practice of the script dominating storytelling by setting up standard plot points. And the film begins with the slow opening on the audio track of Donna Summer's pop hit, "On the Radio," which repeats during transition scenes. A song of remembrance, it creates an elegiac mood underlined by the soft visuals.

In child development class, alarmed by Jeanie's holding her baby doll upside-down while washing it, the distressed teacher scolds, "We show our babies love!" But love is exactly what these girls lack. Earlier, Annie's father handcuffed her sister at home to keep the girl from getting an abortion. Dee's divorcing parents have no time or place for her, and Jeanie's mother, now a forty-year-old trying to finish her undergraduate degree at UCLA, needs mothering from her daughter. The girls dream of getting a place of their own, a physically and emotionally separate place to escape. At first it seems that they have such an opportunity when Madge's boyfriend, Jay (Randy Quaid), an older working man, offers to let them have his place while he is out of town on business. The girls celebrate with a little dinner party, but it is invaded by other teens, including a rough bunch of guys who start a fight and trash the place. In the aftermath, Jeanie's mother decides to move out with her new boyfriend and Madge faces Jay's anger and frustration. When the girls offer to pay for all the damage, Jay yells that they could work years waitressing at Denny's before they could come up with that much money, a moment that underlines the girls' limited economic options. Annie's father confines her in a hospital, but the druggy teen escapes and runs off. Eventually Annie ends up with a couple who pick her up, intending to engage her in a sexual escapade, but in the aftermath of a traffic accident, she dies. The film ends with Madge marrying Jay, and a now college-bound Jeanie taking the wedding flowers to Annie's grave, finishing the elegiac tone of the entire narrative.

Foxes presents a world where girls must negotiate a situation governed by dysfunctional adults who have all the power: physical and institutional in the case of Annie's cop father, and economic for the other girls. There are no happy solutions to the situations they face: Annie dies—more from poor judgment under distress (taking the ride) than any self-destructive impulse. Madge finds her Mr. Right, and for a moment the girls seem to have, as Dee calls it,

"a place of our own . . . a family, sort of," but they cannot prevent outsiders from wrecking it. Madge and Dee revert. Only Jeanie, the motherly leader, pushes on, remembering Annie and looking forward. The film is bittersweet. Reality intervenes in living as an adult, and aspirations cannot be met without paying dues. One could read the conclusion in terms of Lewis's postulate of a fundamental conservatism in the endings of teen films, but I would argue that the film's ending validates the near-utopian fantasy of the girls finding their own space and way. Within an overall elegiac mood, the film overturns Wolfe's counterintuitive position that the new way of life for teens rests on an extreme vapidness in individuals. *Foxes* shows the social situation of girls unable to transcend their larger social situation, but the film concludes it is not their fault. Jeanie is the object lesson—she carries on by learning to adapt and solve problems with the options she has at hand.

***Little Darlings*: Contested Bonding**

Little Darlings contrasts Angel (Kristy McNichol), a working-class girl, tough on the surface, living with her single mom, to Ferris (Tatum O'Neal), a fifteen-year-old private school student and daughter of wealthy (and divorcing) parents. The pair meet on their way to a girls' summer camp. Against a typical high-key, comedic *mise-en-scène*, the campers engage in sports activities, camp songs, and a comic food fight. Angel and Ferris's initial antipathy turns to intense rivalry when a sexually active teen who has been modeling for television commercials challenges the pair to lose their virginity. Encouraged by the other campers, Ferris schemes to entice a high school teacher working as a camp counselor (Armand Assante), while Angel is attracted to Randy (Matt Dillon), a boy from a nearby camp. Filled with hyper-romantic illusions, Ferris pursues but is (predictably) gently turned away by her inappropriate love object. However, she gives the other girls the false impression that the pair did make love.

Meanwhile, narratively cross-cut with Ferris's adventures, Angel awkwardly pursues Randy. She paddles a canoe to his camp across the lake and gets him to come away with her. Angel gives him bootlegged beer to turn him on but he passes out. The next encounter takes place in a dark abandoned boathouse with chiaroscuro lighting underlining the tension. Angel's hesitation, awkwardness, and actual modesty turn Randy off (though not before his hunky teen body is displayed wearing briefs). Finally, in another boathouse meeting,

she overcomes her nervousness and tentativeness, but instead of experiencing sex as a consummation and blossoming of an emotional relation, Angel concludes, "I feel so lonesome." Returning to her camp mates, Angel denies anything took place. Later she breaks off the relation with Randy explaining, "We started in the middle." At last, sadder but wiser, Angel and Ferris tell each other the truth and bond. Arriving back from camp, Angel introduces Ferris to her mom as "my best friend." The camera freezes them in a close two-shot smiling at each other.

Little Darlings contains two different fantasies. For Ferris it provides the overt fantasy of romance with a handsome older man (presented as a mild and comic delusion in O'Neal's excellent performance). For Angel it balances pleasure (her aggressively gazing at Randy's body, reinforced by shots of him from her point of view) with realistically awkward and hesitant emotional scenes. Although Randy is clumsy and somewhat confused by Angel's mixed signals, he is not mean or careless with her. After sex and her revelation that it was her first time, he tries to talk with her and reestablish their relation. Later he argues they could start over from the beginning. Although the film seems conservative on one level, actually it contains a different fantasy within a cautionary tale. Essentially *Little Darlings* recommends that girls resist peer pressure and manipulation, that they try to avoid being what they are not or are not ready to be, and it urges the reward of emotional life as "best friends" as an adequate substitute, at least at this stage of life. Of course, it is precisely this same-sex bonding that allows the further fantasy of a lesbian love between the two. This is reinforced by bookended sequences: initially Angel is seen lighting up a cigarette and then having a taller boy verbally come on to her. She responds by unhesitatingly and swiftly kicking him in the groin. And in the final shot the gal pals have their arms around each other as they smile into each others' faces. Even without taking the story to an active homoerotic fantasy, the film endorses holding on to homosocial girl friendship.

Times Square: Breaking Away

Times Square opens at night on West 42nd Street, in the 1970s the notorious Manhattan neighborhood of porn shops, X-rated movie theaters, strip bars, sex shows, and other lowlife venues. Among the druggies, pimps, and disco dolls, sixteen-year-old Nicky (Robin Johnson) appears as a street-savvy runaway, a street musician with a

guitar and amp. Loud, brash, destructive, and aggressive, she is carted off to a psychiatric hospital where she shares a room with another distressed teen, conventionally feminine rich girl Pamela (Trini Alvarez), thirteen, daughter of an unctuous widower, the mayor's commissioner to clean up Times Square. The girls bond and escape the hospital. They steal an ambulance, establish homeless quarters in an abandoned wharf, steal food, wash auto windows for change, set up a three-card monte game, comically attempt a mugging, and escape a pursuing cop. Throughout this section, the girls' fun, energetic, and rebellious spirit is encouraged by the denizens of Times Square who support, rather than threaten, the pair. Upbeat contemporary music adds to the mood. (Producer Robert Stigwood was a major record executive who produced *Saturday Night Fever* [1977] and *Grease* [1978]. The soundtrack features The Talking Heads, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Suzi Quatro, The Cars, The Ramones, The Pretenders, and The Cure.)

Nicky takes Pamela to a bar where waitresses dance topless. Pamela is hired on, though she will not undress. Her first performance starts awkwardly, but quickly her sheer energy takes over and wins the crowd, to the pride of a now-very-butch-looking Nicky with tied back and slicked-down hair. The pair quickly become midtown, street-culture icons, especially as the very femme Pamela's picture appears on "missing child" posters, and they draw the attention of late-night DJ Johnny LaGuardia (Tim Curry)—who has been mocking the attempts to clean up Times Square by picturing the campaign as a moralistic response by uptight official elite culture against the vibrant, earthy, creative perversions at society's bottom. With the runaway pair now dubbed the Sleaze Sisters, and amplified throughout the city by the DJ, Nicky believes she can become famous. When the pair begin a guerrilla theater gambit by dropping television sets off roofs, Pamela begins to have misgivings, seeing the destructive aspect of Nicky's manic behavior. "We're going to crash," she warns. When Johnny LaGuardia shows up at the wharf hideout, bottle of vodka in hand, he and Pamela drink. Nicky arrives and mistakenly thinks they are romantically involved. She attacks, smashes things up, tears up poems Pamela had written, jumps in the river, and breaks down, calling for "Pammy."

Refitted with maintenance drugs, Nicky makes a final midnight appearance performing in Times Square. Pamela's media savvy has gathered a crowd of teen girls, dressed in black plastic garbage bags (a kind of "if they treat us like garbage, we'll be garbage" fashion

statement), and Nicky, on top of a movie theater marquee, sings her signature number. As the police close in to arrest her, she leaps off into the crowd, which safely captures her in a blanket, and they all run off together into the night.

Times Square provides a pair of fantasies. The runaway rich girl learns to become self-sufficient, emotional, and expressive—to shout, to dance, to stride around enjoying herself in public space. But she also becomes more responsible, as she ends up taking care of Nicky emotionally. Although Pamela returns home to her father's domain, it is as someone who is a young adult, no longer a little girl. Nicky provides the fantasy of being able to survive on the street. The unreal aspect of this is much more obvious today: in the film the girls do not have to face rape, theft, street drug culture, lack of medical care, and brutal winter weather. But the film appeared before homelessness became a widespread phenomenon in the 1980s when Reagan calculatedly engineered the removal of social safety nets, downsizing welfare and aid programs and deliberately driving up unemployment to shape up the workforce. Today Nicky's situation would be read as an unmistakable example of bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder, and her attractive manic energy would be interpreted as self-destructive much sooner. Also, in retrospect, the film's interpretation of Times Square redevelopment is hopelessly naive. The film postulates it as "caused" by traditional morality rather than recognizing the source as business interests who long have used scare arguments about morality and crime to promote their economic agenda.

Times Square has other problems. The film bombed in its initial release (for example, playing only a week in Chicago before disappearing). In 1999 it was shown on a cable movie channel, leaving a new audience to claim it. Though not atrocious, the direction badly misses its mark in key scenes. Director Allan Moyle fails to cheat shots in the final crowd sequence, ineptly making it appear that only a handful of girls are present, rather than the thousands that the fantasy ending needs. A crucial turning point, a recognition scene between Pamela and her father, when he appears at the club to see his daughter dancing, fails to underline the parent's sudden awareness of his child's sexual potential and the changed understanding that results for both. And the Johnny LaGuardia radio figure is haltingly conceived (compared to, say, the same device in *Choose Me* [1984], *Talk Radio* [1988], *Rude* [1995] or in Moyle's *Pump Up the Volume* [1990]).



Figure 1. Gauzy diffuse light warms the opening scenes of *Foxes*.

Visualizing Girls' Space

Although projective social fantasies are solidly grounded in narration, their visual expressions often remain fixed in memory, just as the pictures in a child's book may be vividly recalled long after the story is forgotten. In these three films key moments of production design reinforce the fantasy projection of girls' space.

Of the three films, *Foxes* displays the most accomplished visual *mise-en-scène*. The opening sequence establishes a familiar teen girl scene as the camera in close-up glides slowly over the details of Jeanie's bedroom and what seems like the early morning aftermath of a sleepover (see figure 1). Gauzy diffuse light warms the markers: hair curlers, Clearasil, Twinkies, deodorant, pictures of John Travolta and



Figure 2. The dinner party at Jay's apartment.

Kiss, polaroids, and sleeping teen faces. As the radio alarm summons everyone awake, the day begins, the group stirs, and Annie is doused with water—a mildly comic representation of her recalcitrant relation to normality. The warmth of this beginning is gradually undermined. First we realize it is another school day, then that Jeanie's mother was not home the night before, and finally—explosively—that Annie's father is at the door trying to physically apprehend his runaway daughter. The utopic girls' space is vulnerable to adult instability. And against encroaching children. When Madge's parents agree to host a party for her friends, complete with beer, the annoying presence of little sister and her middle school pals destroys the fantasy.

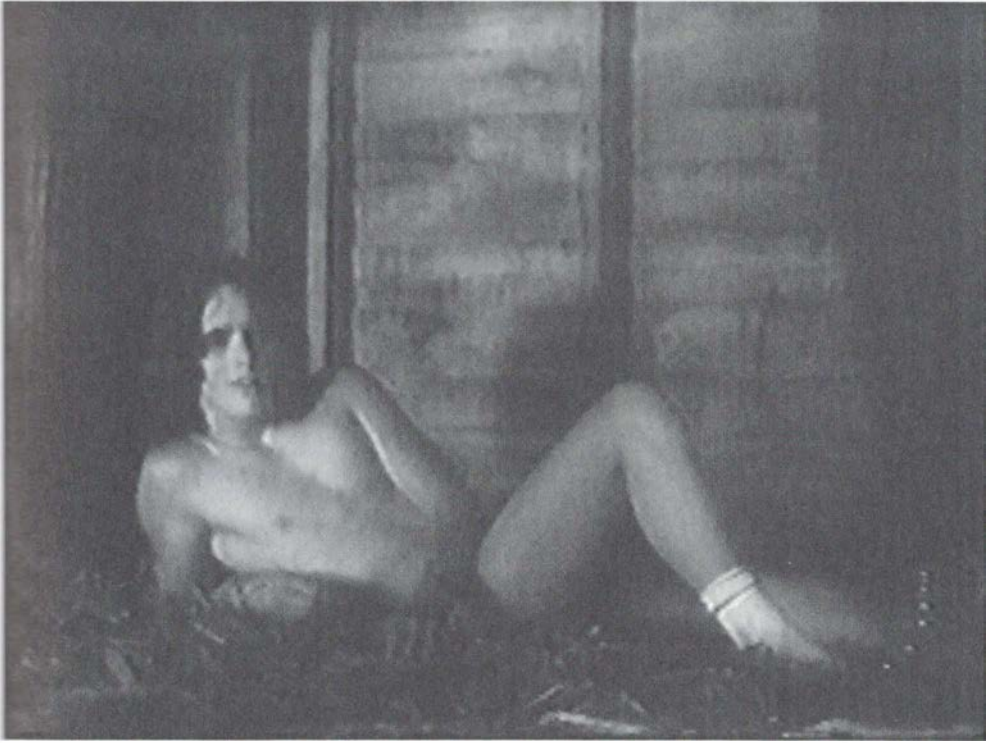


Figure 3. Randy in the stark seduction sequence in *Little Darlings*.

While Jeanie's pickup truck gives her some safe mobility, the adult world remains dysfunctional. At the rock concert Jeanie's father holds a deeply personal discussion with his daughter in the appropriated privacy of a backstage men's lavatory. The girls' supreme fantasy space is displayed when they hold a small dinner party for a few boys at Jay's apartment (see figure 2). But the ensuing destruction again visually demonstrates the instability of girls' space.

Although *Little Darlings* transpires in the (almost) all-girl space of summer camp, it is a space controlled by adults who can be challenged only through the libidinal infantilism of a food fight. Angel finds the private space of the old boathouse to prepare for her seduction of Randy. But the appropriated place remains stark, dramatic,



Figure 4. One of the few secure places the girls make in *Times Square*.

and "masculine," without any conventionally "feminine" conveniences or comforts such as a bed or bathroom (see figure 3).

In *Times Square*, while the Sleaze Sisters appropriate public space on West 42nd Street (as in the three-card monte game), that action is always temporary and unstable since the authorities chase them. Their only secure place is the nest they construct in an abandoned wharf (see figure 4). But when an outsider arrives, it destabilizes the relationship. While they are on the run, the only safe public space is the topless bar, itself only tangentially secure (see figure 5).

The visual depiction of a place for girls in all three films underlines that though the protagonists may find, in Virginia Woolf's phrase, "a room of one's own," these spaces are inherently temporary, contingent, and unstable—just like the girls' lives.



Figure 5. The only safe public space for the girls—a topless bar. *Times Square*

Girls on the Edge

In the 1970s, British cultural studies analyst Angela McRobbie began important work on girl culture. Although she established key parts of the terrain based on U.K. experience, historical change and a North American framework call for modifying some of that analysis. The initial flush of fandom for Madonna in the early 1980s, for instance, marked a “girls just want to have fun” reclamation of girls’ space through the vehicle of music video as detailed by Lisa Lewis. Susan Seidelman’s 1982 film *Smithereens* featured a bold post-punk female who made it seem more interesting to break away than stay at home—a theme continued with star power three years later in Seidelman’s *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Periodic repetitions

of rebellious girl images, as with the short-lived but notable Spice Girls, marked the power of a projective fantasy of "girl power." Some try to dismiss early Madonna or the Spice Girls, or Mariah Carey, who seems to successfully recycle a teen girl image in many of her videos. But that dismissal goes along with the easy disregard for girls themselves.

In contrast, sentimental male fantasy coming-of-age films are consistently overvalued in film culture, for example *American Graffiti* (1973), *The Graduate* (1967), *Blue Velvet* (1986), and *The Lion King* (1994). The three girl culture films I have discussed here first appeared at a particular moment for girl culture. Largely ignored in a male version of cinema history (Jon Lewis does not mention them in his book), these three films have found their place in a low-key and awkward way. *Foxes* has been recently reissued on tape, highlighting Jodie Foster's continued fame, and *Little Darlings*, twenty years later, is still on the comedy shelves at my local video store, which relentlessly displays only works with a steady rental base.

It is true that the three films are all-white. People of color appear only as background—local color in *Foxes* and *Times Square* and totally absent from *Little Darlings* (which also—and without any explanation or reflection—has all the happy campers singing a Christian hymn together). But the films also have no noticeable product placements and other trappings of High Concept filmmaking. They stand as some of the last examples of mainstream Hollywood film before the full force of blockbuster-driven economics struck. In that sense they are interesting as examples of the quirky offbeat style and stories allowed in the aftermath of the studio era and before "different" meant only Sundance-auteurist.

The late 1970s were peculiar times for girls. The Women's Movement was more than a decade old in 1980, but it seldom spoke well to the issues of teen girls. Although feminism expanded the material conditions for girls by addressing reproductive rights and sexual abuse of children, the image of the women's movement as depicted in mainstream media and in some cases actual practice often conveyed a male-bashing rhetoric, downwardly mobile counterculture lifestyle, and proscriptive standards of behavior and appearance. For girls in the process of freeing themselves from the constraints of childhood, second-wave feminism often negated key concerns of girls becoming women in areas they wanted to explore: dress, cosmetics, grooming, heterosexual activity, and teen culture—especially in music and dance. At a time when the two new music

expressions were punk and disco, *Ms.* magazine feminism seemed stuck hopelessly in folksong.

The decade of the 1970s was also a period of economic uncertainty. High inflation and high unemployment rates meant girls were still in the typical position of having vastly fewer options than their male peers. It was also the time of the last big push for the never-to-be-passed Equal Rights Amendment. There was actually a teen girl in the White House—Amy Carter—but many tsK-tsked at her relatively liberal interests (such as ecology) and actions (she appeared once on “Saturday Night Live”). In this somewhat bleak landscape, few noticed what would become in the next twenty years the most important face of teen feminism: girl sports. Gymnastics, ice skating, track and field, and tennis, for example, produced Olympic stars and world champions while little-noticed Title IX mandated equitable treatment for women in school athletics. This created the material and cultural foundation for later triumphs such as women’s soccer in the late 1990s. Twenty years earlier, these three films, like the teens in *Foxes*, stand in an awkward relation to 1980 culture—unable to find their own place but depicting a difficult, strained, and often unjust situation that called out for change.

NOTES

This essay developed out of an independent study on girl culture with Laura Vazquez and Janie Hayes—they taught me a lot. Julia Lesage and Kathleen Karlyn discussed the films and issues with me as well. Dave Tolchinsky and Jon Lewis gave valuable feedback.

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